

maintained the volunteer militia group as part of the State Guard under the command of the adjutant general of North Carolina. As veteran members of the WLI advanced in age, Veteran and Reserve Corps of the WLI were organized in 1892. The Veteran Corps was comprised of men who were members prior to April 15, 1861. The Reserve Corps was comprised of members who had been active members in good standing for five years. The Veteran and Reserve Corps assisted active members through leading by example and “inspiring them with that ‘esprit de corps’ so essential to the welfare of a military organization.”⁶¹ These men of the Reserve Corps also provided behind-the-scenes management within the WLI, connecting it with other facets of the white supremacy movement.

Members of the Wilmington Light Infantry came from throughout the city and represented a cross section of upper- and middle-class families. Sons of prominent white Wilmington businessmen served in the WLI as they worked themselves up through the ranks of Wilmington businesses as clerks, accountants, and bookkeepers. Candidates for membership had to apply to join by letter, and their applications were then voted on by other members; 5 negative votes equaled rejection. Once a member, the initiate was required to participate in drills and meetings. Prompt payment of dues and expenses related to membership was expected. Furthermore, the corps required members to uphold strict guidelines for conduct and public appearances while in uniform.⁶²

⁶¹ Wrenn, *Wilmington North Carolina*, 206-207; Hayden, *WLI*, 45; Wilmington Light Infantry, *Constitution and Bylaws* (1904) Cape Fear Museum, 15-19. See Appendix F for Roster of WLI and Naval Reserves members.

⁶² WLI, *Constitution*, 15-19; *Wilmington Messenger* November 26, 1905, December 16, 1905; Hayden, *WLI*, 45-46.



Unidentified member of WLI, n.d.
Image courtesy of Cape Fear Museum,
Wilmington

The leadership of the WLI took pains to separate themselves from the citizen's patrol even though Commander Walker Taylor was a prominent member of the Democratic Party's county committee and clandestine organizations. Other members of the WLI were also members of the White Government Union. In the literature generated by participants and witnesses, a distinction is drawn between the citizen's patrols and the official state militia in the uniforms of the WLI. As part of their role as official members of the state's home guard, the WLI sought to provide additional peace measures in the city. WLI member John Metts wrote on November 9 that the past week had been exceptionally busy. On the Saturday night before the election, he was ordered by Captain T. C. James to “order the company up” because there were reports of the blacks forming mobs in the northern and southern sections of the city. The reports proved false but still demonstrated the readiness of the WLI.⁶³ In

⁶³ For further indication of the differences between the WLI and the Citizen's Patrol, witness James Cowan's explanation that once the WLI was